

Contributions.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD—HOW PROCURED, HOW KEPT.

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"More pleasure in pursuit than possession" is doubtless a debatable question as regarding things terrestrial. For things celestial there is but one side. That side is possession. The subject under discussion touches two worlds. What is Christ's is Christian. What is Christ's is eternal. A Christian brotherhood is procured thro and kept by Christ. "They shall never perish, no one shall snatch them out of my hand," John 10 : 28. Christian brotherhood is a thing on earth but belongs to heaven. It therefore differs from all other brotherhoods of men and the means of procuring it must be different.

Possibly we can best clear the way to a better understanding of our subject by considering some things which are used or have been used to procure this desired end.

Probably nothing has been more counted upon than "*Oneness of belief*." We shall not dispute the effectiveness of this method to produce a human brotherhood or that it is not an essential element in Christian brotherhood. But the point at dispute is will it procure a Christian brotherhood? Facts are stubborn things but the fact is patent to us that all the essentials of a Christian brotherhood are often absent from those who seem most closely bound by a oneness of belief. The *bond of union* must be something deeper than doctrine or creed. Many churches have mistaken the cause for the effect. A unity of belief in any doctrine may procure harmony. But harmony is not Christian brotherhood any more than the keys on an organ is the music of the organ. Men may believe the same thing, but the unity of their lives, their love for one another may be as far removed as the east is from the west. True Christian brotherhood will produce a unity of life and doctrine which will be harmonious. Unity of doctrine will be the product of Christian brotherhood. Any church or body of Christian people who attempt to procure a Christian brotherhood upon the basis of oneness of belief will find as thousands have found it in the past a miserable failure. The fruit does not bear the tree but the tree the fruit. Unity in doctrine is the fruit of Christian brotherhood. Take your New Testament

and see if Christian brotherhood is not made a more prominent doctrine than unity of belief. If so, why? For the reason just given, also see John 13 : 35.

Another means used is, "non-conformity to the world and uniformity in dress." We must look for results where the cause is at work. Do we find a truer Christian brotherhood where this doctrine is practiced than where it is not? Do we find it stronger where these means are used to keep it? If the principles or the spirit of Christian brotherhood were manifested to a greater degree by the Quakers and the Tunkers, than by the Methodists or Presbyterians, we would have to concede to the practice and recognize the principle as essential to procuring and keeping a Christian brotherhood.

Neither experience nor observation have shown us any difference in degree or kind, among these representative brotherhoods, in that which we recognize as Christian brotherhood. We are not arguing against the principle of non-conformity as a Christian doctrine but against the use made of it in procuring and to keeping a Christian brotherhood.

Christian brotherhood is not procured by anything without the man but is a vital principle of that life which is born from above. It is said of those baptized on day of Pentecost that "they continued steadfast in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers." Here we have Christian brotherhood. We have it intensified in the 46 and 47 verses of the same chapter, Acts 2, "And day by day continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God"—Here was unity, here was harmony, here was peace and joy, here was all that constitutes a Christian brotherhood. Three things are to be noted, and we shall see how they came to procure this blest state. 1. What was preached to them. 2. Their manner of compliance. 3. Their after conduct. Christ was preached to them, Jesus the son of David, the son of God, the resurrected one. They were promised remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit upon their repentance and baptism.

"They received his word," i. e. they believed and acted upon what Peter preached, "they were baptized" and while the word does not state they received the Holy Ghost it is doubtless implied. They continued in company

of the apostles and were, as Christ commanded, *taught* to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them. They did all to the glory of God. From these Scriptures we see that Christian brotherhood is a result growing out of the regenerated and renewed heart. All the ecclesiastical laws that you can make will not make a Christian out of an unregenerate man. Neither can such laws make a Christian brotherhood out of unchristian men.

All the obedience which a man can render to outward ceremonies will not regenerate his heart and fill it with that love "which suffereth long and is kind." That love that loveth another as Christ loved us, and without it there can be no Christian brotherhood.

Christian brotherhood can be secured only when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This love *will* keep God's commandments, not because obedience makes us Christians but because we are Christians. This love will make us loving, not because we belong to a brotherhood which has the prefix Christian attached to it, but because we are Christian.

Christian brotherhood was secured and kept by the apostolic converts:

1. Because they believed—gave up to God—which is the true idea of belief.
2. They received the gift of the Holy Ghost.
3. They kept company with the apostles and were willing learners.
4. They lived for a purpose, the glory of God.
5. They consecrated every-day living.

So long as these converts held to these things there was Christian brotherhood. When that brotherhood began to decline we shall find that a departure was made in one or more of these conditions. Our battle cry is, "back to the apostles." Let us to-day set about restoring these conditions and to-morrow we shall see apostolic brotherhood, i. e., true Christian brotherhood. Let us surrender all to God and all the fullness of the Spirit is ours. Let us by that Spirit teach the Word. Let us assemble together. Oh, how much is being lost to us by a willful neglect of the assembly! Let us be teachable. Too many go to church to criticise and to see, some even to be seen. They criticise the preacher and his preaching, the choir and its singing, the deacon and his prayers. What wonder that they go from God's house and God's service filled with a spirit of evil and not good. What wonder they say,